



State of Connecticut
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Commission on Children



The Importance of Fatherhood: Promising Efforts to Promote Positive Father Involvement

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Summary

In recent decades, fathers have become increasingly involved in their children's lives. But fathers are still much less involved than mothers. It has been estimated that fathers engage their children only two-fifths as much as mothers do and are only two-thirds as assessable to their children as are mothers. Additionally, in the past three decades, there has been a dramatic rise in the number of children living in households without fathers. In 1994, 24% of American children lived in a single mother household, up from 8% in 1960. Most single-mother households are the result of the high divorce rate in this country, but a growing number are due to never-married child rearing. In 1993, almost 10% of children in the United States were living with never-married mothers, up from less than half of a percent in 1960. This rise in father absence has attracted public concern across the political spectrum, and the reaction has been unanimous: For the sake of our children and the communities in which they live, it is imperative that government as well as community organizations make efforts to promote positive father involvement.

The purpose of this report is threefold:

- First, to review the research findings concerning the consequences of both father involvement and father absence.
- Second, to discuss model programs and legislation designed to promote positive father involvement.
- Third, to propose recommendations for a Connecticut fatherhood initiative.

I. Research on Father Involvement

Fathers interact uniquely with their children. Research indicates that this unique involvement contributes to the cognitive, social-emotional, and moral development of children from infancy through early adulthood. Positive father involvement also benefits parents.

Father absence has been found to be detrimental to children. Children of single-mother families are at modestly greater risk, compared to children whose parents are married, for dropping out of school, becoming teen parents, and being detached from the workforce as young adults.

On a broader scale, father absence is associated with a number of social problems. Research indicates that communities with high levels of father absence tend to also have high rates of poverty, crime, and young men in prison. However, one must be cautious in interpreting these findings because they are correlational and do not imply father absence causes the other problems with which it is associated.

II. Promoting Positive Father Involvement

Efforts to promote positive father involvement generally have one or more of three aims:

- First, efforts can aim to increase positive paternal involvement in families where the father lives with his children.
- Second, efforts can aim to facilitate and support positive connections between non-residential fathers and their children.
- Third, efforts can aim to prevent father absence.

Developmental psychologist Michael Lamb and his colleagues have identified a hierarchy of four factors influencing paternal behavior, all of which must be met in order to successfully enhance men's involvement with their children. These factors include:

1. Motivation;
2. Skills and self-confidence;
3. Support;
4. Institutional practices, such as father-friendly workplaces.

To effectively promote positive father involvement, a repertoire of programs and legislation might be designed to impact all four of the factors.

A. Programs

A variety of programs exist that are designed to promote father involvement. They can be divided into three general categories:

Prevention – These programs focus on preventing young men from fathering children until they are prepared to be good parents. These programs are often school- or community center-based, and are usually aimed at adolescents and preadolescents.

Connection – These programs address the most basic connection between father and child: The man's acknowledgement that he is the child's father. The best time to establish paternity is at birth, and programs can dramatically increase the rate of paternity establishment by encouraging fathers to fill out the forms while at the maternity ward. There are also opportunities to establish paternity well after birth, and some programs work with low income absent fathers to assist them

in connecting psychologically and legally with their children.

Support – A number of resource centers and support groups have been established to help provide support to residential and non-residential fathers.

B. Legislation

Currently, all 50 states report some sort of effort to encourage responsible fatherhood, but far fewer states have embarked upon comprehensive campaigns to promote father involvement. State efforts involve:

Summits and task forces – Several states have launched comprehensive fatherhood initiatives by holding a fatherhood summit or convening a fatherhood task force. These efforts help to raise public awareness and promote collaboration between state agencies, local communities, and families.

Economic support for fathers – As part of welfare reform, many states have passed legislation that no longer denies public assistance to families with fathers in the home.

Program funding – Many states make grants available for prevention programs.

Public awareness campaigns – Many states have launched PSA campaigns to increase public awareness about the importance of involved fatherhood.

Paternity establishment – Voluntary maternity ward establishment has become a popular model for increasing states' paternity establishment rates.

Divorce – Some states hope that divorce legislation will help to cushion family disruption. Divorce legislation includes laws mandating counseling for divorcing couples to help their children through the family disruption, facilitating visitation rights for non-custodial fathers, or making it more difficult to get divorced.

Punitive measures – Some states punish fathers who are not responsible financially or sexually. These measures include child support "most wanted" lists, revocation of driver's and professional licenses, and prosecution of statutory rape.

To be successful, efforts to promote positive and involved fatherhood must be comprehensive. They should involve different types of programs and legislative models designed to promote father involvement on multiple levels. Below are several specific recommendations for Connecticut:

1. **Paternity establishment** - Initiate a voluntary paternity establishment program in maternity wards and other health care settings. (pg. 19)
2. **Prevention funding** - Consider offering funds to teen-pregnancy prevention programs and other institutions serving children and families for designing programs that focus explicitly on fathers. (pg. 20)
3. **Father involvement in early childhood education** – In the School Readiness Bill, explicitly state that parent involvement must include fathers as well as mothers. The bill

could also be amended to provide incentives for the training of male childcare staff. (pg. 20)

4. **Father-friendly employers** – Promote state agencies as model father-friendly employers. (pg. 20-21)
5. **Conference** - Consider organizing a meeting of fatherhood experts, lawmakers, community leaders, and parents to brainstorm ideas for a fatherhood initiative that involves the state, communities, and families. (pg. 21)
6. **Judicial Review** – Investigate the impact of the state's judicial system on fathers and families. (pg. 21)

The Importance of Fatherhood: Promising Efforts to Promote Positive Father Involvement

In recent decades, fathers have become increasingly involved in their children's lives (Pleck, 1997). But fathers are still much less involved than mothers. It has been estimated that fathers engage their children only two-fifths as much as mothers do and are only two-thirds as assessable to their children as are mothers (Pleck, 1997). Furthermore, in the past three decades there has been a dramatic rise in the number of children living in households without fathers. In 1994, 24% of American children lived in a single mother household, up from 8% in 1960 (Horn, 1996)*. In 1990, 18% of Connecticut children lived with single mothers (1990 US Census Data). Most of these single-mother households are the result of the high divorce rate in this country, but a growing number are due to never-married child rearing. In 1993, almost 10% of children in the United States were living with never-married mothers, up from less than half of a percent in 1960 (Doherty, Kouneski, & Erickson, 1996). Most studies indicate that non-residential fathers truly are absent. They tend to have infrequent contact with their children and many do not even pay the child support that they should (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). It is likely that never-married fathers have even less contact with their children than do divorced fathers.

This rise in father absence has attracted public concern. According to a recent Gallup poll, 79% of Americans either agree or strongly agree that "the most significant family or social problem facing America is the physical absence of the father from the home." (National Center on Fathering, 1996). This concern is shared across the political spectrum, and federal government has begun to address the issue. In 1995 President Clinton issued a memorandum to strengthen the role of fathers in families and a variety of government agencies have mobilized to address this request. (For a detailed description, see Department of Health and Human Services, 1995, 1997). Additionally, in 1994 Vice President Gore launched a nationwide Father to Father movement encouraging experienced fathers to mentor young fathers. Last year, the Senate Subcommittee on Children and Families of the Committee on Labor and Human Resources held a hearing to examine initiatives designed to encourage responsible fatherhood. Furthermore, conservative think tanks dedicated to promoting positive father involvement, such as the National Fatherhood Initiative and the National Center on Fathering, have begun to spring up. Several states have also begun to organize fatherhood task forces. The conclusions of these various federal, state, and private initiatives have been unanimous: For the sake of our children and the communities in

which they live, it is imperative that government as well as community organizations make efforts to promote positive father involvement.

The purpose of this report is threefold. First, the research findings concerning the consequences of father involvement and father absence are reviewed. Second, model programs and legislation designed to promote positive father involvement are discussed. Third, recommendations are made for a proposed Connecticut Fatherhood Initiative.

I. Research on Father Involvement

In recent years, research on fathers has burgeoned. Two general fields of research have emerged. The first field investigates the benefits of father involvement in married-parent families. There are three levels of father involvement: amount of fathers' engagement with their children, fathers' accessibility, and fathers' share of responsibility in taking care of their children (Pleck, 1997). To be beneficial, this involvement must be positive (Pleck, 1997). The second field looks at differences between children growing up in married-parent families and single-parent families. These two fields of research indicate that father involvement benefits children and parents, while father absence is detrimental to children and parents.

Fathers interact uniquely with their children. For example, researchers consistently report that fathers, compared to mothers, engage in play more frequently and more physically (Lamb, 1997). This unique paternal involvement contributes to the cognitive, social-emotional, and moral development of children from infancy through early adulthood. In young children, positive father involvement is positively related to cognitive performance, empathy, self-control, appropriate sex-role behavior, and security of parental attachment (Lamb, 1997; Pleck, 1997; Pruett, 1988; Van Ijzendoorn & De Wolff, 1997). In school-aged children and adolescents, positive father involvement is positively related to academic performance, social competence and self-esteem, and is negatively related to behavior problems (Cooley, 1998; Hosely & Montemayor, 1997; Lewis, 1997; Pleck, 1997; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1997). In a study of fathers and their children spanning four generations, Harvard psychologist John Snarey (1993) found that fathers' involvement was predictive of the educational, social, and occupational success of their children in young adulthood. Furthermore, he found that the best predictor of men's involvement with their children is the involvement of their fathers when they were growing up.

Positive father involvement benefits parents in addition to children. Snarey (1993) found that father involvement not only does not impede occupational success, but it is modestly related to greater occupational success. Other studies also suggest that involvement with one's children serves as a buffer for work-related stress and can increase productivity (Levine & Pitt, 1995; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). Furthermore, Snarey (1993) found that marital success is predicted by men's involvement with their children.

Unfortunately, fathers who are divorced or never-married often have limited contact with their children (Doherty, Kouneski, & Erickson, 1996; Furstenberg & Cherlin, 1991). Furthermore, even when non-residential fathers remain involved in their children's lives, the benefits of this involvement are questionable, particularly if a father does not have a good relationship with his children's mother (King, 1994).

Not surprisingly, father absence has been found to be detrimental to children. For example, in a study utilizing four national data sets, Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur at the University of Wisconsin (1994) have found that children of single-mother families are at modestly greater risk, compared to children whose parents are married, for dropping out of school, becoming teen parents, and being detached from the workforce as young adults. Children of never-married mothers are slightly more at risk than children of divorce. Additionally, McLanahan and Sandefur found that the risks experienced by children of single-mothers are not significantly reduced by the presence of step-fathers.

A good deal of the increased risk experienced by children of single-mothers is due to the loss of their fathers as economic providers (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). Furthermore, single-mother families move more frequently and have fewer community support resources than do married parents (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). These factors affect mothers as well as children. Because of their low income level and isolation from community support resources, single-mothers experience greater amounts of stress than do married mothers (Weinraub & Wolf, 1983).

Fathers also suffer from being separated from their children. In fact, fathers may suffer more depression and psychological problems as a result of divorce than do mothers (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). Evidence shows that fathers who have never been connected with their children also suffer adverse psychological consequences such as depression and low self-esteem (Levine & Pitt, 1995; Pleck, 1997). Additionally, Rutgers University sociologist David Popeno (1995) argues that responsible fatherhood helps to socialize men as responsible members of society. When men forfeit the responsibility of fatherhood, they run the risk of becoming marginalized from society.

On a broader scale, father absence is associated with a number of social problems. A number of conservative theorists and policy makers argue that father absence is the leading cause of a number of this country's social ills (Blankenhorn, 1995; Horn, 1996; Merrill, Schweizer, Schweizer, & Smith, 1996; Popenoe, 1996). Research does indicate that communities with high levels of father absence tend to also have high rates of poverty, crime, and young men in prison (Blankenhorn, 1995; Merrill, Schweizer, Schweizer, & Smith, 1996; Popenoe, 1996). From these findings it is tempting to conclude that father absence contributes to the social ills. However, one must be cautious in interpreting these findings because they are correlational and do not imply father absence causes the other problems with which it is associated. For example, research also indicates that the economics of poverty contribute to a great number of social ills (e.g. Wilson, 1996), and it could be argued that father absence is a symptom of impoverished communities, not a cause.

II. Promoting Positive Father Involvement

Efforts to promote positive father involvement generally have one or more of three aims. First, efforts can aim to increase positive paternal involvement in families where the father lives with his children. Second, efforts can aim to facilitate and support positive connections between non-residential fathers and their children. Third, efforts can aim to prevent father absence. These aims are not mutually exclusive, and successful efforts should incorporate all three of them.

In order to effectively promote positive father involvement, it is also important to understand the factors underlying father involvement. Developmental psychologist Michael Lamb and his colleagues (Lamb, 1997; Pleck, 1997) have identified a widely adopted hierarchy of four factors influencing paternal behavior, all of which must be met in order to successfully enhance men's involvement with their children. These factors include: motivation, skills and self-confidence, support, and institutional practices. A father's motivation is influenced by his personality characteristics, his family history (including growing up with his own father), his beliefs, and the beliefs of the community to which he belongs. Once motivated, a father must have confidence in his skills and ability as an individual and as a man to successfully raise his children. To be successfully involved with his children, a father must also be supported by his family and community. Furthermore, it is imperative that institutions, such as a father's workplace and the child care and educational institutions which his children attend, do not impede (and hopefully encourage) his involvement with his children. On a broader institutional scale, society must provide social and economic support for fathers' involvement. To effectively promote positive father involvement, a repertoire of programs and legislation should be designed to impact all four of the factors.

A. Programs

A variety of programs exist that have at least one of the three aims mentioned above and are designed to impact multiple factors influencing father involvement. These programs can be further divided into three general categories. The first category consists of programs designed to prevent males from fathering children until they are prepared to be good parents. The second category consists of programs designed to connect fathers with their children either at birth or after a period of absence. The third category consists of programs designed to support fathers' continued involvement with their children. Specific examples of programs are discussed below. [Program descriptions are based upon information provided by the programs and/or profiles from Levine and Pitt's (1995) *New Expectations: Community Strategies for Responsible Fatherhood*.]

Prevent. Programs designed to prevent males from fathering children until they are prepared to be good parents are usually aimed at adolescents and preadolescents. These programs are offered by a variety of institutions, including schools, community centers, and religious groups. The most widespread prevention effort in terms of sheer numbers is sponsored by the evangelical organization, Focus on the Family (Levine & Pitt, 1995). Focus on the Family publishes *Breakaway* magazine, a publication that preaches abstinence until marriage to boys age 12 to 16. The magazine has grown dramatically in the past twenty years, and currently has a circulation of over 100,000.

Most prevention efforts, however, take the form of curriculum-based programs offered in schools or community centers. These programs have typically focused on females, and research indicates that teen pregnancy prevention efforts may be less effective for males (Allen, Philliber, Herrling, & Kuperminc, 1997). Recently, Planned Parenthood, in conjunction with the Children's Aid Society and Philliber Research, outlined a conceptual framework for successful male focused teen-pregnancy prevention programs. This framework is graphically represented in the attached Figure 5. The authors conclude that successful programs should be long-term and intensive, provide close relationships with caring adults, elicit the support of peers and parents, and focus on skills building and activity-based lessons.

One program that conforms to these guidelines is in operation here in Hartford. *Always on Saturday* is a 32-week teen pregnancy prevention program sponsored by the Hartford Action Plan on Infant Health. Boys and girls age 9-18 participate in gender segregated two and a half hour sessions every Saturday. The program consists of four components. The first component, the curriculum, consists of special activities and field trips designed to prevent teen pregnancy by promoting the maturity and responsibility of group members. The curriculum is administered by adult advisors who also serve as positive role models. The second component is the leadership training of older adolescents so that they can become peer facilitators, serving as positive role models for the younger group members. The third component consists of parent workshops designed to involve parents in the program and teach them how to discuss adolescent issues, such as sexuality, with their children. Fourth, participating teens are encouraged to partake in community service projects so that they stay involved beyond the Saturday sessions. No published evaluation of this program has been conducted, but the curriculum does adhere to many of the guidelines for successful programs outlined by Planned Parenthood. Also, *Always on Saturday* has recently been profiled in *Involving Males in Preventing Teen Pregnancy*, a report by the Urban Institute on 24 pregnancy prevention programs nationally that have successfully involved males (Sonenstein et al., 1997).

The school-based father-focused prevention curriculum receiving perhaps the most national attention is Minnesota's *Dads Make a Difference* paternity education program. The goals of this program are to prevent early parenting, to increase the father involvement of future generations, and to advocate for paternity establishment and child support. This program has been adopted statewide in Minnesota and is being replicated by several other states as well. The program's curriculum, which is designed for students in middle school, consists of four activity-oriented sessions. In the first session, students watch a video of interviews with teen parents and then discuss the meaning of "risk." In the second session, students learn about the financial and psychological benefits of legally establishing paternity. In the third session, students discuss different type of families and learn about familial risk and protective factors. Additionally, they explore the realities of having to pay child support. In the final session, students construct life lines of things that they want to accomplish in their future. Then they discuss how their life lines can be altered by risks, such as teenage sex.

The most unique aspect of the *Dads Make a Difference* curriculum is that it is taught by high school students. Before teaching the four-session curriculum, these students, along with adult advisers, partake in an intensive two-day training session. In this way, the program benefits older adolescents in addition to the middle school students. A pre- and post-test evaluation of *Dads Make a Difference* indicates that, despite its short duration, the program is instrumental in altering the attitudes that the high school student teachers and the middle school students have towards sex and fatherhood. However, evaluations have not yet investigated whether the program results in behavior changes of its participants

Connect. Programs to promote fathers' positive involvement with their children must first address the most basic connection between father and child: The man's acknowledgment that he is the child's father. This establishment of paternity has clear financial benefits for children. When paternity is established, children are eligible for social security and health care benefits (if their fathers are insured), and fathers are also legally responsible to contribute financial support to their children. But paternity establishment has psychological benefits as well. It encourages

fathers to develop a sense of responsibility towards their children, and even if fathers do not get involved in their children's upbringing, the children still grow up with a better sense of their heritage and identity (Levine & Pitt, 1995).

The best time to establish paternity is at birth. A statewide program in West Virginia based upon this premise has dramatically increased the rates of paternity establishment in the state. In this program, nurses in maternity wards encourage new fathers to establish paternity on the spot while at the hospital. Additionally fathers who establish paternity are given a copy of the Declaration of Paternity Affidavit so that they can show it off in the waiting room. Since implementation of the program, the rate of paternity establishment has risen from under 15% to approximately 60%. Levine and Pitt (1995) estimate that this relatively inexpensive program saves West Virginia taxpayers over \$32,000 per year because it reduces the difficulty and expense of tracking down absent fathers who have not established their paternity. Similar hospital-based paternity programs exist in other states and will be discussed in the next section of this report.

Even if fathers do not establish paternity at birth, programs can encourage them to do so at a later date. Since father absence is most prevalent in impoverished families, most of these programs focus on helping low income fathers. Two such programs that have received national attention are the Institute for Responsible Fatherhood and Family Revitalization in Cleveland, Ohio, and the Paternal Involvement Project in Chicago, Illinois.

Charles Ballard, the founder and president of the Institute for Responsible Fatherhood and Family Revitalization, believes that paternal involvement benefits fathers as much as it benefits children. As a social worker, he began by helping young inner-city men by encouraging and facilitating their emotional involvement with their children. Although he did not focus on the legal aspects of responsible fatherhood, Ballard found that many of his clients expressed interest in establishing paternity. The Institute for Responsible Fatherhood continues to emphasize the emotional connection between father and child, which in turn effectively encourages men to establish legal paternity. A follow-up survey of 78 fathers in Ballard's program indicates that 90% had established paternity and 75% had no new out-of-wedlock children (Levine & Pitt, 1995). Additionally, 62% of the men had found full time employment. Ballard attributes the increase in employment to fathers' newfound sense of responsibility for their children.

The goal of the Paternal Involvement Project is to strengthen families by promoting the involvement of absent fathers. The project is based upon the belief that the denial of the relationship between poor men and their children perpetuates a negative cycle of dependency in impoverished communities. The project works with 200 young fathers per year, and it focuses on increasing their employment opportunities and self-esteem so that they can work to establish legally and psychologically meaningful relationships with their families. The project reports that it has successfully met these goals in many cases.

In Connecticut, *Dads Do Make A Difference*, a collaborative effort between the Tate George Dreamshot Foundation and the Department of Social Services, aims to connect fathers and their children on multiple levels. *Dads Do Make A Difference* has begun to pilot a hospital-based paternity establishment initiative in hospitals in Hartford and New Britain. In this initiative, new fathers are given "Dads' tool kits" that include materials designed to highlight the positive aspects of paternity. *Dads Do Make A Difference* is also piloting a similar initiative to connect

fathers with their children through preschools. *Dads Do Make A Difference* is involved with a number of additional efforts, some of which are highlighted later in this report.

Support. After a father forms a connection with his child, he must feel supported by his family and his community in order to remain involved. A number of resource centers and support groups have been established to help provide such support to residential and non-residential fathers. One model program is the Fathers' Resource Center in Minnesota. There are six resource centers, two in Minneapolis – St. Paul and four in the surrounding suburbs. These centers consist of many components including a Father to Father mentoring program that matches experienced fathers with young fathers; father support groups; legal aid and advocacy for fathers; parenting classes, including those for couples going through a divorce; a course to help men deal with anger; and transitional housing for homeless men and their children. Additionally, the center offers workshops for other organizations, and the center's director, J. Neil Tift, offers a service in which he travels to various states and communities to help them implement plans to promote father involvement.

A qualitative evaluation of the Fathers' Resource Center in St. Paul has been conducted. The evaluation focused on the father support groups and the parenting classes. The results indicate that the programs are appropriately focused and well facilitated. The evaluation concludes that the Fathers' Resource Center provides valuable information, has a strong and diverse network of referral services, and is broadly visible in the Twin Cities.

One example of a support program in Connecticut is Family ReEntry's Fathers Helping Fathers program. Fathers Helping Fathers is a 10-week series of support groups for fathers who are being asked to better connect with their children. The program has published a list of issues facing fathers that have been identified by participants in the support groups. These issues include: dealing with their children's mothers, knowing how to talk to and engage in activities with their children, disciplining their children, overcoming a sense of powerlessness to impact the lives of their children, and legal issues such as child support, custody and visitation.

Additionally in Connecticut, *Dads Do Make A Difference* offers individual and group counseling and support to fathers who wish to be more positively involved in their children's lives. *Dads Do Make A Difference* attempts to reach fathers from a wide range of backgrounds by advertising on billboards and by distributing pamphlets through a variety of community organizations. Additionally, *Dads Do Make A Difference* has sponsored a number of public events, such as sports events, for fathers and their children. By attending these events, fathers can engage in activities with their children while at the same time serving as public advocates for their children.

B. Legislation

While some of the programs described above receive state funding and two of them are being implemented statewide, they all began at the grass roots level. Recently, positive father involvement has begun to be promoted at the state level as well. While the state efforts tend to focus on father absence, most of them consider the benefits of positive father involvement as well. States promote father involvement through legislation and funding in a variety of ways. Currently, all 50 states report some sort of effort to promote father involvement, but far fewer states have embarked upon comprehensive campaigns (National Center for Children in Poverty,

1997), In this section, state efforts involving summits and task forces, economic support for fathers, program funding, public awareness campaigns, paternity establishment, divorce, and punitive measures will be considered. [Descriptions of state efforts are based upon information provided by state agencies, and by the Council of Governor's Policy Advisors' *What States Are Doing to Promote Responsible Fatherhood: A National Survey* (1996) and the National Center for Children in Poverty's *Map and Track: State Initiatives to Encourage Responsible Fatherhood* (1997).]

Summits and task forces. Several states have launched comprehensive fatherhood initiatives. These initiatives usually commence with either the organization of a fatherhood summit or the convening of a fatherhood task force. Such initiatives serve two purposes: they bring the issue of involved fatherhood to the public's attention, and they organize a collaboration of state agencies and local communities to work towards a common goal. Some examples of fatherhood initiatives are described below:

In June of 1996, the Massachusetts Department of Human Resources held a Fatherhood Summit. Fatherhood experts, service providers, policy makers, local fatherhood groups, and other community organizations were invited to the one-day event. The focus of the summit was on father absence. Subsequently, Governor Weld established the Commission on Father Absence and Support. The six-month old commission consists of various subcommittees which are considering how to better engage and involve fathers on a number of levels. This spring, the committee is due to present a list of recommendations to the governor. According to John Wagner at the Department of Human Resources, the focus will be on legislation, and the first step will probably be to have state agencies evaluate themselves as to how father friendly they are as employers.

Last year the governor of Colorado convened a Task Force on Responsible Fatherhood. The task force has published a report in which it outlines a number of recommendations, including proposed legislation, for the promotion of father involvement in the state. The task force is also holding a Fatherhood Summit this month. The summit is targeted for local parents as well as for service providers and policy makers. The governor will give the keynote address, and Vice President Gore has been invited. A number of fatherhood experts will conduct workshops on father friendly workplaces, paternity establishment, child support, the impact of father involvement on child development, fatherhood programs, teen pregnancy prevention, and fathers of children with special needs. These sessions will be followed by a panel discussion which will hopefully lead to an action plan for helping communities to promote father involvement.

Additionally, the Colorado Task Force formed a Judicial Action Committee to review the impact of the Colorado judicial system on fathers and families. The committee has proposed an overhaul of the judicial system to make it more 'user-friendly' for fathers and families. The committee's recommendations emphasize speeding up and simplifying the judicial system, minimizing parent conflict, and focusing on education for parents and judges (Colorado Responsible Fatherhood Initiative, 1997).

The governor of South Carolina held a Fatherhood Summit on September 30. The summit is being held for service providers, the clergy, and children's advocates. Fatherhood experts made presentations in two plenary sessions. The impetus for this summit was a report published by the Palmetto Family Council concluding that father absence in South Carolina is related to higher

rates of high school dropouts, juvenile crime, teen pregnancy and welfare participation (Merrill, Schweizer, Schweizer, & Smith, 1996).

Other states have taken similar steps. The Ohio Department of Health sponsored a "Men are Parents Too" conference in 1994. The Governor of California held a "Focus on Fathers Summit" on Father's Day, 1995. Indiana and North Carolina both held conferences in the fall of 1996. The Indiana conference focused on a national review of fatherhood programs. Additionally, the governor of Florida created a Commission on Fatherhood in 1996. Its goal is to encourage fathers to play an active role in their children's lives.

Economic support. The federal welfare system (AFDC) was frequently criticized for contributing to father absence by providing economic incentives for mothers to remain single. The devolution of AFDC into state block grants has given states the opportunity to reform welfare so that it is easier for married parents to receive public assistance. At least 25 states (including Connecticut) are developing welfare systems that are designed to be more father friendly by providing incentive to encourage marriage of parents and the involvement of non-residential fathers. Taking a different approach, several states have also begun to request that mothers applying for public assistance supply the names of their children's fathers so that it will be easier to force the men to financially support their children.

Program funding. At least half of the states provide funding to programs designed to promote positive father involvement. Much of this funding goes to prevention programs. For example, in Minnesota, part of the state's 1996 education bill makes Male Responsibility and Fathering Grants available to programs that collaborate with school districts to educate young people, particularly young males, on the responsibilities of parenthood. Funding may be granted if each dollar of state money is matched by at least 50 cents of non-state money, and if programs work towards the following expected outcomes: "Recipient programs must assist youth to: (1) understand the connection between sexual behavior, adolescent pregnancy, and the roles and responsibilities of marriage and parenting; (2) understand the long-term responsibility of fatherhood; (3) understand the importance of fathers in the lives of children; (4) acquire parenting skills and knowledge of child development; and (5) find community support for their roles as fathers and nurturers of children." Additionally, grantees must provide legal information about paternity and must provide public awareness efforts.

Dads Make a Difference is one program funded by a male responsibility and fathering grant. The state further supports *Dads Make a Difference* by providing its curriculum and training guide free of charge to all public schools in Minnesota. It is in this way that *Dads Make a Difference* is a statewide program, even though its director, Gary Greenfield, estimates that the program currently reaches only about 3% of Minnesota teens. Several other states, such as Vermont, Texas, Michigan, and California, have also funded curricula designed to prevent males from having children until they are prepared to be good fathers.

Public awareness campaigns. Over 30 states report that they are implementing campaigns to heighten public awareness about the importance of fatherhood. For example the Virginia Department of Health, working with the National Fatherhood Initiative, has embarked upon a public service announcement campaign whose purpose is "to educate the Virginia media and enlist their support in communicating the messages of the consequences of fatherless families; through various media, familiarize the general public with the importance of fathers to the health

and well-being of children and communities; [and to] mobilize citizens throughout the state to work with community-based organizations to promote responsible fatherhood." The effectiveness of this campaign is in the process of being evaluated. Furthermore, representatives from the National Fatherhood Initiative conduct regional forums for community leaders to discuss the implementation of local fatherhood projects. The state also runs a resource center whose purpose is to provide fathers with information on how to be positively involved with their children. Prior to embarking upon the fatherhood initiative, the Department of Health has sponsored a report detailing the negative health outcomes associated with father absence.

In Connecticut, *Dads Do Make a Difference* has already launched a comprehensive public awareness effort. Using the metaphor of families as teams, the effort focuses on the potential benefits of positive father involvement. Components of this effort are discussed previously in this report.

Establishment. West Virginia's Hospital Paternity Establishment Program (described previously) has become a popular model. Many other states have implemented hospital-based voluntary paternity establishment programs. Some of these programs involve the dissemination of information in the form of brochures or videos to new fathers. Other, more intensive programs, involve trained staff encouraging fathers to sign paternity affidavits on the spot. As in West Virginia, these programs have contributed to marked increases in the rates of paternity establishment. In Missouri, in-hospital maternity rates were up 35% last year. In both Nebraska and New Hampshire, the rates of paternity establishment for non-marital births increased to almost 60% following the implementation of hospital-based programs. An important element of these paternity establishment programs is that they frame establishment in a positive light, focusing on the benefits of fatherhood.

Divorce. In an attempt to cushion the disruptive blow that divorce often has on families, at least 12 states have passed legislation that promotes counseling and education for parents on the impact of divorce on their children. In Connecticut, this type of counseling is required for all couples who have initiated divorce proceedings to help parents work well with their children during this time of loss. Additionally, several states have passed legislation that facilitates non-custodial fathers' visitation with their children. Another type of divorce legislation that a few states are considering makes divorce more difficult by revising no-fault divorce laws.

Punitive measures. Although many state efforts aim to positively promote father involvement, some states have begun to punish fathers who are not involved. Three types of punitive measures have become popular. The most common punitive measure is to revoke the driver's and/or professional licenses of non-residential fathers who do not pay their child support. At least half of the states have adopted this strategy. Additionally, at least five states post "most wanted lists" of fathers who do not pay their child support. At least 7 states, including Connecticut, have begun to try to prevent father absence by prosecuting men for statutory rape in hopes that the threat of incarceration will serve as a deterrent.

III. Recommendations

States' efforts to promote positive father involvement are, for the most part, still in an embryonic stage. Even though a large number of states have implemented some type of legislation to promote father involvement and a growing number of states are launching comprehensive fatherhood initiatives, only a few have reached a point where these good intentions have been translated into effective legislation. As a result, there is a paucity of comprehensive legislative models on which to base proposals for Connecticut. Nevertheless, several recommendations are offered. Generally, a successful fatherhood initiative should be comprehensive, utilizing various state and community agencies to promote father involvement on multiple levels. Specifically:

1. **Paternity establishment** - Two innovative legislative models exist. These two models are particularly attractive because they focus on prevention and because they are inexpensive. The first involves paternity establishment procedures such as those adopted by the Hospital Paternity Establishment Program in West Virginia. The one-time cost of project development for the Hospital Paternity Establishment Program was \$27,000 for the training of 400 staff members in the 34 maternity wards in which the program has been implemented (Levine & Pitt, 1995). Connecticut already has a relatively high rate of paternity establishment (68%), but voluntary paternity establishment procedures through maternity wards and other health care facilities could help reach the one-third of men who are not establishing paternity.
2. **Prevention funding** - The second innovative model involves program funding such as the Male Responsibility and Fathering Grants in Minnesota. The Minnesota grant program is inexpensive in that it requires the matching of non-state money, and because the programs it funds are connected to already existing educational institutions. Connecticut might consider offering funds to existing institutions serving children and families for designing programs with the explicit goal of promoting father involvement.
3. **Father involvement in early education** - Furthermore, there is another timely opportunity for Connecticut to incorporate an emphasis on father involvement into legislation. The School Readiness Bill states that programs must include parent involvement, parenting education, and outreach. This wording could be changed to state explicitly that parent involvement, education, and outreach must include fathers as well as mothers. The bill also provides funds for the training of staff. The bill could be amended to provide incentives for the training of male staff, who are vastly underrepresented in the fields of child care and early education.
4. **Father-friendly employers** - The state should serve as a model father-friendly workplace. On the federal level, the Department of Health and Human Services (1995, 1997) has helped transform the government into a model father-friendly workplace by evaluating the efforts of all federal employers to implement practices such as family and medical leave, flex-time, and child care. If Connecticut were to do the same, the state government could serve as a model for other employers in Connecticut and for other state governments.
5. **Fatherhood conference** - Connecticut could consider organizing a meeting of fatherhood experts, lawmakers, community leaders, and Connecticut parents to brainstorm ideas for

a fatherhood initiative that involves the state, communities, and families. The fatherhood summits in other states serve as possible models of such a meeting, as does the service that J. Neil Tift offers through the Fathers' Resource Center. A meeting would raise public awareness about the importance of involved fatherhood, and it could serve as an impetus for a comprehensive and collaborative fatherhood initiative.

6. **Judicial Review** – As in Colorado, a committee could be formed to review the impact of Connecticut's judicial system on fathers and families.

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